

The Circuit Writer

NEWSLETTER OF THE COMMISSION ON ARCHIVES AND HISTORY
Northern New Jersey Conference, The United Methodist Church

Fall 1974

ABOUT NORTHERN NEW JERSEY METHODISM

DANISH METHODISTS IN PERTH AMBOY

As a bustling seaport town in the Civil War period, Perth Amboy became a natural haven for Danish sailors. They had come from their homeland to begin life anew and to improve their economic status. Although members of the state church (Lutheran) in their homeland, they sought a more vital religious experience in their new land. Many were attracted to revival services in the newly built Simpson Methodist Episcopal Church on the corner of High and Commerce Streets. There they found satisfaction for their spiritual hunger. Having this gift stirred up within them, they began to work for the evangelization of their countrymen.

The newly-converted Methodists from Denmark were invited to hold meetings in the home of Mr. James Buck, who lived in the "Old Stone House" on Fayette Street. In these meetings, conducted by lay members at first, quite a few fellow Danes were converted. By June 10, 1869, their numbers had so increased that they decided to organize officially as a Methodist class with Jacob Thompson as class leader. Although several Scandinavian Methodist preachers from the New York area conducted services once in a while, most of the time lay persons led the meetings.

Five years later the class had multiplied into a church. Twenty-four members formed themselves into a congregation and took the name First Danish Methodist Episcopal Church. The date of incorporation was October 26, 1874. After two years of meeting in the chapels of the Methodist and Presbyterian churches and even Mr. Mandeville's school house, a modest frame church was erected on State Street. The Rev. Burriel Smith, a Dane, was first pastor (1874-1880, 1891-1898), serving simultaneously a Swedish congregation in Dover. The Church joined the newly organized Norwegian-Danish Annual Conference which was strongest in the mid-West. Under able leadership the church grew in faith and in numbers and in 1898 a handsome new brick church seating 250 was erected on the corner of Madison Avenue and Jefferson Street during the pastorate of the Rev. Andrew Hansen (1898-1904). Looking back fifty years in 1924, pastor C. J. Conrad (1921-1925) could name a dozen former members who answered the call to the Christian ministry. Services were held in Danish until 1925 when the church began to use English at its principal services. Upon the dissolution of the Norwegian-Danish Annual Conference in 1941, the church joined the Newark Annual Conference and was re-incorporated under the name Wesley Methodist Church. Changing population patterns in Perth Amboy led the church to relocate in Edison in 1956 where a new church building was erected.

--John Christofferson, Wesley Church, Edison

CELEBRATING THE HERITAGE

- CLIFTON:** Belle Vista-Simpson Church throughout October celebrated its 80-85th anniversary with a series of fellowship and worship events. The celebration culminated in a special worship service October 27, in which Bishop Taylor was the preacher. A small collection of records was presented to Dr. Kenneth E. Rowe of Drew University for safe-keeping in the Conference Archives at Drew. The "80-85th" designation for the anniversary was a reference to the individual histories of the two congregations, the 80 years for Belle Vista and the 85 years for Simpson, then located in nearby Paterson. The two congregations merged in 1970 after a fire destroyed the Simpson Church.
- ENGLEWOOD:** Dr. Charles Farlin addressed the 110th anniversary service of First Church, Englewood, on the history of world Methodism and First Church. He also presented a historic picture of the young John Wesley being rescued from the burning parsonage at Epworth.
- HILLSDALE:** Celebration of the 100th anniversary of the Hillsdale Church was continued with a Spring Fashion Show. Members of the UMW modeled the latest styles and some costumes from the collection of Mrs. Edward Farrell dating back to the early 1800's. A handsome commemorative booklet, containing a "Chronicle of a Century" by Howard Durie, was published in May.
- MOUNT FERN:** During the month of June, fourteen persons of the Mt. Fern Church participated in the "John Wesley Great Experiment" by trying to abide by the following five guidelines: (1) Arise at 5:30 AM for Bible study, prayer and reflection--each day; (2) Tithe for the entire month; (3) Provide at least three hours of service to the church each week (visitation, special tasks, etc.); (4) Gather once a week with other participants for discussion and prayer; and (5) Tell others of the "Experiment." Another month-long opportunity to participate in the "Experiment" was held this Fall. The Rev. Eugene W. Hamilton, Jr., is pastor.
- UNION VILLAGE:** Church anniversaries, like wedding anniversaries, can either be an occasion for nostalgia and sentimental remembering or an occasion for newness and renewal. The Union Village Church, about to celebrate its sesquicentennial in 1975, hopes the latter will be the case with them. The theme chosen by the Administrative Board for the anniversary year is "Outreach '75". Plans for the year include a Lay Witness Mission in February, a Festival of the Arts in April, and a Homecoming in June. The final celebration will occur on December 7th with Bishop Taylor preaching and a special anniversary dinner in the afternoon.

CELEBRATING THE HERITAGE - continued

OTHERS??? This is a regular column in our newsletter. If your church is planning an anniversary celebration or preparing a history, please contact the editor.

CHURCH HISTORY CONTEST -Awards to 1973 winners; 1974 competition coming up!

Two of the seven local church histories published during the calendar year 1973 and submitted to the contest were of such high quality that the Commission decided to award two first prizes in the first of its annual local church history competitions. Boxed sets of the recent three-volume HISTORY OF AMERICAN METHODISM were presented to the pastors and church historians of First Church, Rahway and South Orange-Vailsburg during a session of the 1974 annual conference in June.

Has your church published a new history of your local church during the calendar year 1974? If so, we urge you to enter it now in the 1974 competition. Large or small, pamphlet or bound volume, mimeographed or printed, all historical sketches produced during 1974 are eligible. Five churches have already submitted their histories. MAIL ONE COPY TO: Dr. Kenneth E. Rowe, Drew University Library, Madison, New Jersey 07940 by February 1, 1975. Awards for the second annual contest will be announced during the 1975 session of the annual conference in June.

GRAVE MARKERS FOR UNITED METHODIST MINISTERS

A limited supply of official markers for graves of United Methodist pastors are available from the Conference Commission on Archives & History at \$15.00 each. The bronze markers, which contain a raised figure of a mounted circuit rider and the inscription, United Methodist Minister, may be bolted to the head stone or may be implanted in the ground. Contact the Rev. Paul E. Spiecker, 452 Lafayette Avenue, Hawthorne, N. J. 07506. (Phone 427-0725)

TRAVELING EXHIBIT ON FRANCIS ASBURY

A small exhibit of Asbury memorabilia from the collection of Drew University is available on request for use at special celebrations in local churches. The exhibit includes several mounted prints and photographs, a set of ordination certificates signed by our first Bishop, along with a pair of spectacles he wore. When used with historical items from a local congregation, this makes an attractive addition to an anniversary or other historical observance. Contact Dr. Kenneth E. Rowe, Drew University Library, Madison, N. J. 07940. (377-300, ext. 243)

HANDBOOK ON WRITING A LOCAL CHURCH HISTORY AVAILABLE FREE

A very helpful 15-page pamphlet entitled HOW TO WRITE AND PUBLISH THE HISTORY OF A UNITED METHODIST CHURCH, written by Dr. Wallace G. Smeltzer, has been published by the General Commission on Archives and History. FREE COPIES are available from Dr. Kenneth E. Rowe, Drew University Library, Madison, N. J. 07940.

NEW HISTORY OF METHODISM PUBLISHED

Dr. Frederick A. Norwood, distinguished Professor of Church History at Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary in Evanston, Ill., has written a new one volume history of American Methodism. **THE STORY OF AMERICAN METHODISM** is a factual yet delightfully readable work. It is recommended for local church libraries and all United Methodists interested in their church's heritage. Published by Abingdon Press, the new history is available through our regional Cokesbury bookstore. Start saving now, however: cloth \$17.95; paperback \$9.95 !